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ABSTRACT

For television to be used effectively, teachers need to reorganize their teaching to increase the children's interaction with the program material. One way of getting more participation is to preview and pre-record a program, stopping the replayed cassette at key points, questioning the class, and having them discuss the sequence just seen. Another suggestion is to select and edit extracts from video resource materials that are relevant to specific teaching needs, e.g., using a computer animation or an experiment. Once appropriate video materials have been identified, they can be combined with books or printed materials, and a range of questions or activities for individual learners or small groups can be designed. The last approach suggested would be to have children and teachers create their own audiovisual materials, using low-cost cameras and editing equipment. Cooperation between staff members and reappraisal of the curriculum, with thought being given to other resources such as books and computing facilities, and how they can best be integrated with video, offers the best chance of using television successfully. (DJR)

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USING TELEVISION IN SCHOOLS:

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Article for Times Educational Supplement
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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that for television to be used effectively in schools, teachers need to reorganise their teaching to increase the children's interaction with the programme material. Four different ways in which this can be done are suggested.

GETTING INVOLVED

In any relationship, you only get out what you put in. The same is true with regard to using television in the classroom. It is hardly surprising that television fails to be used adequately if teachers are unable or unwilling to adapt their methods to the requirements of using television material, or if children don't put in the mental effort required to learn from television.

While television can represent knowledge and teach more richly than most other media, including computers, it suffers from two main weaknesses. First, teachers as much as children tend to respond passively to it; for instance it is often difficult to "break into" programme material to draw out relevant teaching points, because of the continuous nature of broadcast programmes and the non-directive teaching style of even educational programmes. Second, in practice it is often difficult to fully integrate broadcasts with the rest of the teaching; programmes don't come quite at the right time or deal with the material in quite the way you want in a particular situation. Broadcasters do what they can to help, by providing teacher notes on pre-programme preparation and post-programme activities, but learning during the actual viewing is assumed to be some mysterious process of osmosis: watching in itself is assumed to be sufficient.

Well, there is enough evidence around to suggest that it isn't. So what can teachers do to make better use of the 1000 programmes or so broadcast each year in Britain? The answer depends to some extent on what one considers to be appropriate roles for teachers today, but in all cases the relatively ubiquitous video-cassette recorder plays a crucial part.

Teacher as Socrates (guide?)

The simplest - and hence most common - way of getting more active participation is to stop the programme at various places. This means pre-recording a programme, stopping the replayed cassette at key points, asking the class questions, and getting them to discuss aspects of the sequence just seen.

As many teachers will know, this is not as simple as it sounds. Quite apart from the usual problems of organising the pre-recording and finding a suitable time and place to show the programme, pupils often dislike the programme being interrupted. Ideally, the programme should be played through first without interruption, then played through with three or four stopping points for questions and discussion - but this may require at least a double period.

Finding appropriate points to stop is not always easy, unless the programme is made in modular form (which is still relatively rare), and the teacher needs to have previewed the programme to know where to stop and what questions to raise. Finding the right kind of question or activity is critical. It is easier to come up with relatively unimportant questions of detail than broader or more fundamental issues in a question form which the class can comfortably handle.

Even so, television does lend itself to different interpretations; different children see different things in the same sequence, thus encouraging discussion. Another advantage of television over books or computers is that a great deal of information of different kinds - pictorial, emotional, factual, subjective - can be packed into one half-hour programme, and a lot of ground can be covered in unpacking this information through discussion.

Teacher as Harold Evans (editor?)

With the increase in video recording facilities, it is now possible for schools or teacher centres to build up a bank of video resource material, which can be used in exactly the same way as reference materials from books in a library. Instead of showing a single, whole programme, selected extracts relevant to specific teaching needs can be taken out from a range of programmes. Thus just a computer animation or an experiment can be used, and not the rest of the programme if it is not considered relevant. This can be done either by using several cassettes winding on in advance of the lesson to the right place on each cassette, or by using two recorders, transferring the required extracts from each programme on to one compilation tape.

Although editing in this way is easy enough to do, it does mean more work for the teacher. Programmes have to be searched for appropriate material, and the editing takes time (although the fast preview on most modern recorders can speed this process considerably). There is much to be said for using a team approach, with several colleagues and a librarian (if one exists) working together to cover a range of programmes. The greatest return comes from this approach if it is built into the first stages of curriculum design before the syllabus for the term or year is finalised, so that where good video material is found, it can be fully exploited in the rest of the teaching.

Teacher as Henry Ford (manager?)

This approach can be carried even further by developing materials for independent or individualised learning. Once appropriate video materials have been identified, they can be combined with appropriate books or other printed material, and a range of questions or activities for individual learners or small groups working together can be designed.

A major reorganisation of the teaching is needed though for this to work. There must be adequate numbers of video-recorders and TV sets for several groups to work in parallel, and the equipment must be conveniently located - but not so conveniently that it can easily be stolen! The best arrangement is a small, dedicated area in the library, but as well as requiring space and money, this also requires a helpful and sympathetic librarian.

Teacher centres can play an important role in fostering this approach. Even more investment of time is required from teachers, so it makes sense for teachers from several schools to work together developing independent learning materials which can be used in several schools.

Teacher as Steven Spielberg (producer?)

All the approaches so far depend on using materials developed by the broadcasting organisations. Even given the very wide range of materials broadcasters provide, they may not meet the needs of particular children in particular locations; more crucially, neither teacher nor children get any insight into how television is designed and created.

The Schools Council "Communication and Social Skills" project though has encouraged children and teachers in selected schools to create their own audio-visual materials, using low-cost cameras and editing equipment. This allows children not only to develop modern communication and social skills, such as language development and team work, but also to understand the process of selection and decision-making and the nature of television's portrayal of events.

Just more work for teachers?

None of these approaches provides an easy solution to the twin problems of passive learning and curriculum integration. The most obvious objection, particularly at a time when the NUT is claiming that teachers work an average 50 hours a week, is that all these approaches seem to mean more

work for teachers. Certainly they all require more "front-end" preparation time: time spent before the teacher gets to the class. Properly organised though, such approaches can actually save time or spread teachers' work more evenly, releasing teachers from being rather poor imparters of information to being personal tutors of individual children in need of specific help or stimulation.

Perhaps a more fundamental obstacle is that it is difficult for an individual teacher to adopt one of these approaches in isolation. Co-operation between several staff and some reorganisation of the school as a whole eases the introduction of these methods. A reappraisal of the curriculum, with thought being given to other resources such as books and computing facilities, and how best they can be integrated with video, offers the best chance of using television successfully.

There are good reasons why schools should try to make even better use of television than previously. There are already signs that some important areas of curricular activity may be taken out of the hands of schools if politicians feel they are not being handled adequately. There is a danger that pupils and parents will also see schools as increasingly irrelevant if they ignore modern media used extensively in the home and work-place. While schools have much more to offer than interesting and effective instruction, they ignore that aspect at their peril, and failure to utilise fully the resource of television may well be seen as a weakness of schools rather than of television itself.

Tony Bates is Reader in Media Research Methods at the Open University and author of "Broadcasting in Education: An Evaluation", recently published by Constables.